



BoysTown

**Table of Contents**

Method ..... 3

    Participants ..... 3

    Survey tool ..... 3

    Design and procedure ..... 4

Results..... 4

    Overall satisfaction and effectiveness ..... 4

    Areas of effectiveness ..... 6

        Increasing parenting confidence ..... 6

        Developing parenting strategies and skills..... 7

        Improving the parent-child relationship ..... 8

        Increasing the understanding of children ..... 10

        Increasing the parent's capacity to cope ..... 11

        Increasing the parent's ability to care for children ..... 12

        Service users want to recommend the service to others..... 13

References ..... 15

**List of Figures**

Figure 1. Respondent's ratings about their level of satisfaction with Parentline. .... 4

Figure 2. Respondents' ratings about Parentline increasing their parenting confidence. .... 6

Figure 3. Respondents' ratings about Parentline developing their parenting strategies and skills.... 8

Figure 4. Respondents' ratings about Parentline improving the relationship with their child..... 9

Figure 5. Respondents' ratings about Parentline increasing their ability to understand their child/children. .... 10

Figure 6. Respondent's ratings about Parentline increasing their capacity to cope. .... 11

Figure 7. Respondent's ratings about Parentline increasing their ability to care..... 12

Figure 8. Respondent's ratings about whether they would recommend Parentline to others. .... 13

Parentline is a confidential telephone service providing professional counselling, education and support to parents and others who care for children and young people. The service operates from 8am to 10pm seven days a week and is available to residents of Queensland and the Northern Territory.

The service provides a mix of assistance through counselling, information and referral that is tailored to meet individual client needs. Callers to Parentline can choose to speak with a male or female counsellor and arrange to speak with the same counsellor in the future.

BoysTown is committed to ensuring that all services meet client needs and are evidence-based in their practice. In line with this, a survey of client satisfaction and outcomes regarding Parentline is conducted on an annual basis. The purpose of the survey is to assess the overall effectiveness of and satisfaction with the service. In addition, the survey measures the perceptions of parents regarding Parentline's assistance with specific areas of parenting effectiveness, such as:

- Parenting confidence,
- Parenting strategies and skills,
- Relationship with child/children,
- Understanding child/children,
- Capacity to cope, and
- Ability to care for child/children.

These parental/family factors are common protective factors that may guard against child abuse and neglect (Counts, Buffington, Chang-Rios, Rasmussen, & Preacher, 2010; AIFS, 2013).

Each year the results are part of a feedback loop to Parentline management and service delivery staff. This report focuses on the results of the client satisfaction and outcomes survey over a four year period from 2011 to 2014.

## Method

### Participants

From 2011 to 2014, 547 participants responded to a survey of client satisfaction and outcomes, ranging from a minimum of 105 participants in 2014 to a maximum of 152 participants in 2012. In total, 87.4% were female and 12.6% were male. In relation to ethnicity, 2.2% identified as Indigenous and 7.7% as from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background.

The majority (88.1%) of respondents were aged between 26 and 55 years. In specific detail:

- 4.4% were aged between 16 and 25 years,
- 20.7% were aged between 26 and 35 years,
- 43.5% were in the 36-45 year age group,
- 23.9% were aged 46-55 years, and
- 7.5% were aged over 55 years.

More than half (50.7%) contacted Parentline once, while 9.5% contacted the service twice, 16.3% contacted 3-4 times, 11.5% contacted 5-10 times, 4.8% contacted 11-20 times, and 7% contacted more than 20 times.

### Survey tool

The survey contained quantitative and qualitative items. The semi-structured questionnaire was designed internally at BoysTown in 2007. It was based on a definition of service impact as defined by staff, a review of clinical literature relating to parenting interventions, and an audit of standardised parenting outcome measures. The questionnaire was designed to capture client satisfaction with the service and self-reported effectiveness of Parentline to assist with a broad

range of parenting support needs. Minor adjustments to the survey were made in 2011 and it is the data from this survey used from 2011 to 2014 that is analysed in this report.

## Design and procedure

The study used a mixed method design. The quantitative component came from the Likert scale items in the survey and the qualitative component was formed from the open-ended questions of the survey.

Parentline Counsellors recruited participants by inviting them to participate in the survey. Counsellors used their professional judgement about whether to recruit participants and did not try to recruit clients who called to discuss sexual abuse or suicide concerns. Clients who agreed to participate would give their contact details and their preferred time of contact. A researcher would contact the participant by telephone. The survey took 5-10 minutes to complete.

## Results

### Overall satisfaction and effectiveness

The majority (97.2%) of respondents provided positive ratings regarding their satisfaction with the service provided by Parentline (see Figure 1). Specifically, 83.1% were 'very satisfied' and 14.1% were 'satisfied'. Of the remaining respondents, 0.9% were 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied', 1.5% were 'dissatisfied', and 0.4% were 'very dissatisfied'.

The majority (96.1%) of respondents also gave positive ratings regarding Parentline's effectiveness. Specifically, 73% of respondents rated Parentline as 'very effective' and 23.1% rated it as 'effective'. Only 1.7% rated Parentline as 'not effective' while 2.2% were unsure about their answer or said the question was 'not applicable' to them.

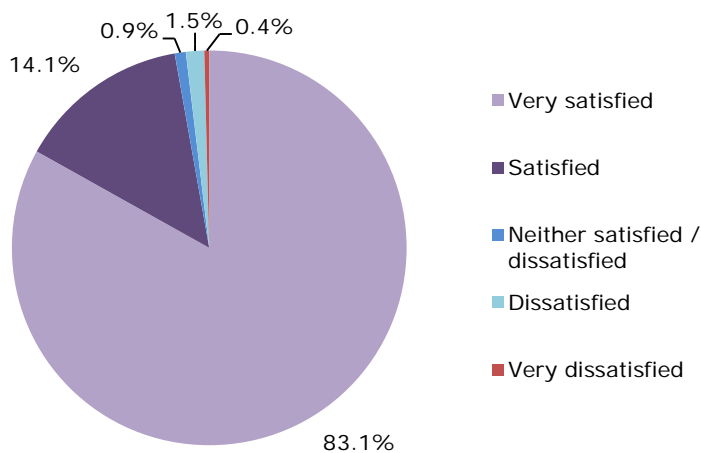


Figure 1. Respondent's ratings about their level of satisfaction with Parentline.

High levels of satisfaction and positive feedback regarding Parentline's effectiveness were also evident in the qualitative feedback given by respondents between 2011 and 2014. For some parents and carers, the main benefit of Parentline was that it gave them unbiased, non-judgemental support and someone to turn to when or if others weren't available.

*(Parent/Carer 2013):*

*"Parentline is a really good service and I think it's a really good tool - in my situation - my parents have both passed away so I don't have any other family to ask advice from. It's really good to have someone else to have as a sounding board".*

*(Parent/Carer 2014):*

*"When you're really struggling to get advice more than your friends can give you it's helpful to get a neutral perspective. It gives support and the confidence to see a way forward. It's the only line I know of that deals with parents. My parents are not here and it gives me someone I can talk to for an objective perspective".*

Some parents also expressed satisfaction because of the empathy and understanding shown by Parentline Counsellors.

*(Parent/Carer 2013):*

*"They didn't lecture or push - just gave advice for me to take on myself - and it really worked. Other services don't even have kids and they don't know where you're coming from. The Counsellor I spoke to was apparent of a teenage boy - and it really helped me".*

*(Parent/Carer 2014):*

*"It is non judgemental - they listen - they can give advice if you want. YOU are in control of the call - and you will feel better after. Everyone knows when I've phoned Parentline because I'm so relaxed afterwards".*

While the overwhelming majority of qualitative feedback was positive, some respondents did offer suggestions for ways the service could improve, including an expansion of Parentline's hours of operation.

*(Parent/Carer 2014):*

*"The thing that infuriates me is that I can't ring after 10 pm - that has been over the years the most difficult. If you're having a bad night as a parent and getting angry and frustrated you can't ring Parentline after 10 pm. Even if open till midnight - as I am so busy as a parent in the evenings (as well as working all day) and so ringing any other time is too hard. Families are not just stay at home mums these days - I work shift work ...and ringing Parentline in the morning is hard. I like to resolve issues so I can sleep at night".*

*(Parent/Carer 2012):*

*"I love that it's non-judgemental and confidential. I just wish it could be 24/7".*

One respondent who was satisfied with the service overall, highlighted that the cost of calling Parentline from a mobile phone is an issue.

(Parent/Carer 2011):

*“(Parentline Counsellors are) very well trained. More behaviour management tips would be good (and) the cost from mobiles is an issue, (but its) great for people in small towns, especially in the Northern Territory”.*

Finally, one respondent requested the creation of a Parentline Application (app), where notes from the call can be passed from Counsellor to the caller and used to start discussions and remind parents and carers of the strategies discussed during the call.

(Parent/Carer 2014):

*“It'd be great to have smart -phone apps with Frequently Asked Questions and/or some brief breakdown of what we talked about so we can use it as a tool, as a couple. The information would be more accessible to both the person who phoned and their partner”.*

It is therefore evident in both the quantitative and qualitative feedback received from Parentline survey respondents between 2011 and 2014, that overall satisfaction levels are high and that Parentline is a highly effective service. The next section of this report will examine the quantitative and qualitative feedback received regarding the effectiveness of the service in more detail.

## Areas of effectiveness

### Increasing parenting confidence

In total, 546 participants were surveyed about their parenting confidence and 94 stated that the question was 'not applicable' to their situation. Of the remaining 452 respondents, more than 80% provided positive ratings for Parentline increasing their parenting confidence. Specifically, 52.7% rated Parentline as 'very effective' and 33.6% rated the service as 'effective'. The ratings about parenting confidence are shown in Figure 2 below.

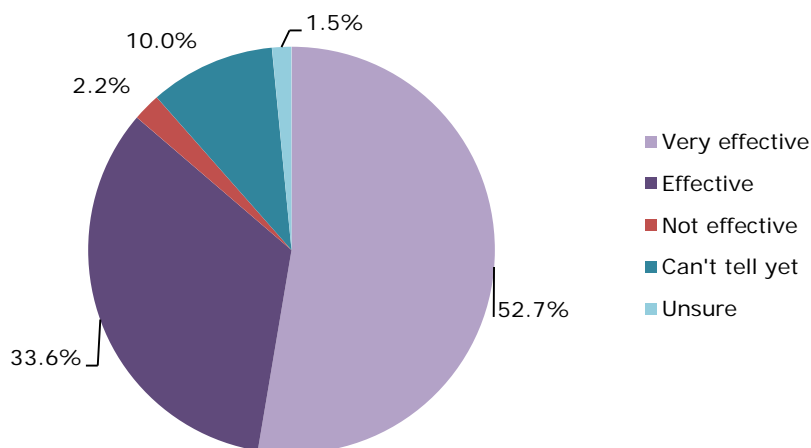


Figure 2. Respondents' ratings about Parentline increasing their parenting confidence.

When respondents were asked at the end of the survey to describe their experience of calling the Parentline service, a number of parents and carers described the empowerment and confidence that came following their conversation with a Parentline Counsellor. Often, respondents spoke about the reassurance they received and how this impacted on their confidence in parenting or caring for their child.

*(Parent/Carer 2012):*

*"I felt confused and inadequate. Afterwards, I felt very empowered, and knew how to help. It was great for me. I'd never called before and it was exactly what I needed".*

*(Parent/Carer 2011):*

*"It was good to have a non biased/non judgemental opinion. (The Counsellor) assures me I'm doing the right thing, (and they) showed me the kid's point of view".*

*(Parent/Carer 2012):*

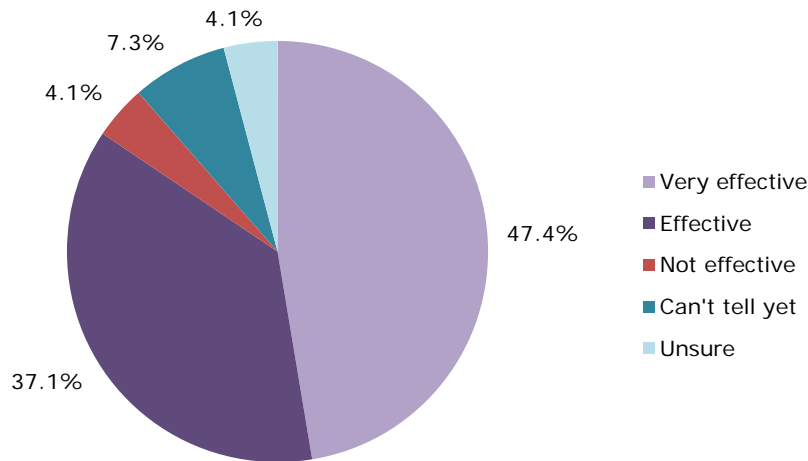
*"(Parentline gave me) information and reassurance. The call increased my confidence and calmed me after my son was being aggressive... I was given tips for helping to manage his developmental stages – more options and ideas".*

*(Parent/Carer 2011)*

*"It's a very good service. (The Counsellors) are very well trained. They're very up-to-date and knowledgeable. They give you confidence and reassurance".*

### **Developing parenting strategies and skills**

In total, 546 participants were surveyed about developing parenting strategies and skills and 109 stated that the question was 'not applicable' to their situation. Of the remaining 437 respondents, more than 80% respondents provided positive ratings for Parentline developing their parenting strategies and skills. Specifically, 47.4% rated Parentline as 'very effective' and 37.1% rated the service as 'effective'. The remainder of the responses indicated that 7.3% were unable to tell of any changes because the survey was conducted soon after the Parentline session, 4.1% gave a rating of 'not effective', and 4.1% were unsure. The ratings about parenting strategies and skills are shown in Figure 3 below.



**Figure 3. Respondents' ratings about Parentline developing their parenting strategies and skills.**

Qualitative feedback from the survey respondents also highlighted the importance of discussing strategies, skills and tools with a Parentline Counsellor. From this feedback it is evident that encouraging parents and carers to view the situation from their child's perspective, and giving them new strategies and ways of communicating, was helpful for parents dealing with stressful situations.

*(Parent/Carer 2011):*

*"It allows me to have another view, in particular with (my son). As a single mum, it was great to have another view, to talk without judgement or criticism and get some ideas".*

*(Parent/Carer 2014):*

*"It reduced my stress levels. It helped me understand three children at diff ages and how I should interact with them given their ages but in the same situation. Also gave me peace of mind and strategies on how to interact with my children when I can't get to see them very often -just to let me children know I care".*

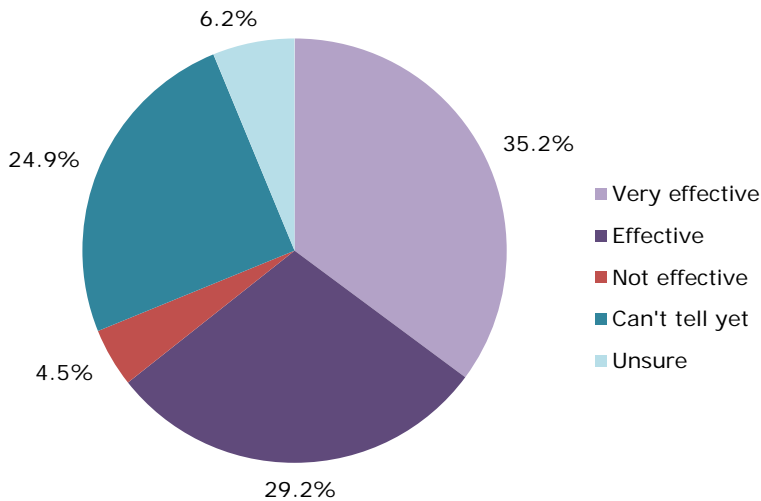
*(Parent/Carer 2011):*

*"The Counsellor was very thoughtful and compassionate. She gave pointers on what I could do and what I needed to do regarding myself and my son. Overall, it was a worthwhile phone conversation".*

### **Improving the parent-child relationship**

In total, 545 respondents were asked about Parentline improving their relationship with their child or children, and 144 stated that the question was 'not applicable' to their situation. Of the remaining 401 respondents, 24.9% stated that it was too soon to tell if there were any changes. The remaining responses were mostly positive. For example, 35.2% of respondents rated Parentline as 'very effective' and 29.2% provided a rating of 'effective' in improving their relationship with the child or children. The ratings about improving parent-child relationship are shown in Figure 4.





**Figure 4. Respondents' ratings about Parentline improving the relationship with their child.**

One of the most common qualitative responses from survey respondents was feedback regarding improvements they had noted since contacting Parentline. While for some parents and carers it was sometimes too early to tell whether the relationship improvements would last, a number of respondents saw change in their relationships with their child or children. For some, this change was evident in the hours immediately following a call to Parentline.

*(Parent/Carer 2012):*

*"They see a different approach coming from me. They listen to me more now – because I am able to be more consistent and am trying to maintain a positive approach. I'm able to give my children unconditional support. They are better educated by me now about how to live healthy lives".*

*(Parent/Carer 2012):*

*"I was more open in communication after the call, we were able to clear the air. She thought I hated her and now she knows I love her".*

*(Parent/Carer 2014):*

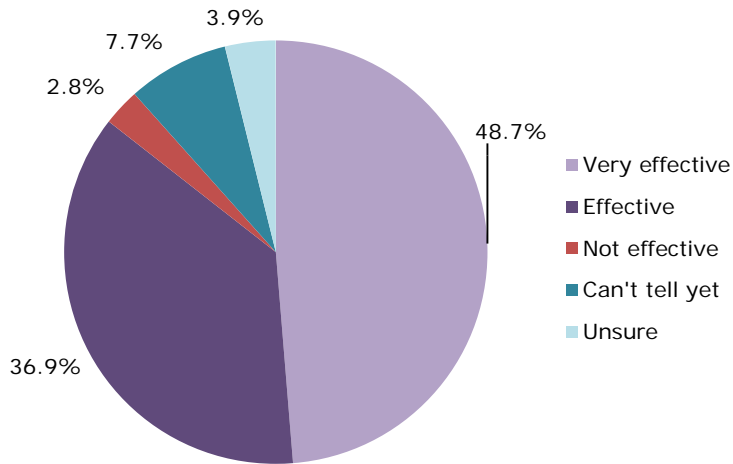
*"That night I was able to communicate with my son rationally. We agreed to just take it from here one step at a time".*

*(Parent/Carer 2013):*

*"Combined with some other strategies things are improving. As a result of that phone call I took time off work and it was what I needed to do - to check my priorities. I had been working hard and long hours. I just rang my boss and said I needed to take 3 days off".*

## Increasing the understanding of children

In total, 546 respondents were asked about Parentline increasing their understanding of children, and 158 stated that the question was 'not applicable' to their situation. While 7.7% stated that it was too soon to tell if there were any changes, the remaining responses were mostly positive. For example, 48.7% of respondents rated Parentline as 'very effective' with an additional 36.9% of respondents stating that Parentline was 'effective' in increasing their understanding of their child or children. The ratings about increasing a parent's or carer's understanding are shown in Figure 5 below.



**Figure 5. Respondents' ratings about Parentline increasing their ability to understand their child/children.**

For many parents, calling Parentline is done with the aim of increasing their understanding of their child, specifically their child's: developmental stage; perspective; and behaviours. Qualitative feedback from a number of parents, demonstrated how their call to Parentline had increased their understanding of their child, and how in turn, this had improved their relationship with their child or children.

*(Parent/Carer 2014):*

*"When I called I was very anxious and worried, and unsure. During the call I became more confident and realised I was doing the right thing for my daughter. I realised what was happening was normal for her - and I needed to be there for her and not give up".*

*(Parent/Carer 2013):*

*"Knowing there is support there - convenient and easy to access. They have insight into the stage of the child and what they're going through to help you understand the situation more. And then you can reflect on how you're behaving yourself in the situation and then you can be more effective".*

*(Parent/Carer 2012):*

*"I could understand better. (It's helpful to talk to) someone that is not involved in the situation. (Makes you feel like) you can carry on".*

### Increasing the parent's capacity to cope

In total, 545 participants were surveyed about their capacity to cope and 45 stated the question was 'not applicable' to their situation. Of the remaining 500 respondents, more than 90% provided positive ratings for Parentline regarding the services ability to increase their capacity to cope. Specifically, 62.0% rated Parentline as 'very effective' and another 29.0% rated the service as 'effective'. The remainder of the responses indicated that 3.8% were unable to tell of any changes because the survey was conducted soon after the Parentline session, 3.0% gave a rating of 'not effective', and 2.2% were unsure. The ratings about increasing a parent's capacity to cope are shown in Figure 6 below.

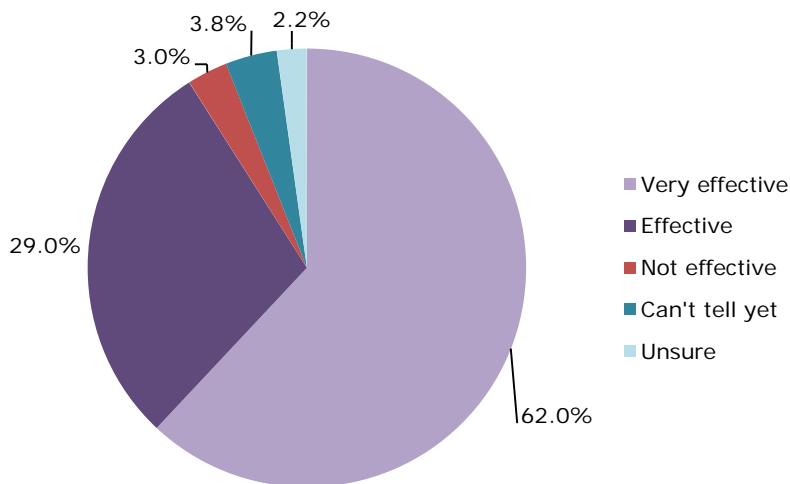


Figure 6. Respondent's ratings about Parentline increasing their capacity to cope.

A number of survey respondents also spoke of the significant impact Parentline has had on their ability to cope. Parents and carers spoke about the impact of Parentline sessions and how the Counsellors had helped them to improve their coping strategies, to deal with a specific parenting situation, or supported them with external factors affecting their ability to parent.

(Parent/Carer 2013):

*"If it weren't for Parentline I would not have coped with my daughter in the last 5 or 6 years. I needed Parentline because my husband had cancer - he died 4 years ago... You can just grab the phone and ring when emotions are running high you need someone. You get off the phone and you see it differently and can put things in place that you wouldn't have thought of. It's so helpful to have that as sometimes you have no one else to turn to for help".*

(Parent/Carer 2014):

*"It's a service that's available for anybody whose a parent or grandparent - it's confidential - supportive - you can have the same counsellor- and nothings too stupid a question to ask. It's just wonderful. You can ring up even if you've just had a very bad day - they are really, really supportive".*

(Parent/Carer 2013):

*"It was a change in me that was needed. I had been wound very tight. The heaviness in my chest was gone. I could face what I needed to face that evening".*

(Parent/Carer 2011):

*"(I felt like a) weight was lifted off my shoulders. I didn't feel alone in my stress".*

### Increasing the parent's ability to care for children

In total, 545 participants were surveyed about their capacity to cope and 174 stated the question was 'not applicable' to their situation. Of the remaining 371 respondents, more than 80% of respondents provided positive ratings for Parentline in regards to increasing their ability to care for their child or children. Specifically, 41.0% rated Parentline as 'very effective' and another 43.4% rated the service as 'effective'. The ratings about whether Parentline is effective in increasing a parent's ability to care for their child or children are shown in Figure 7.

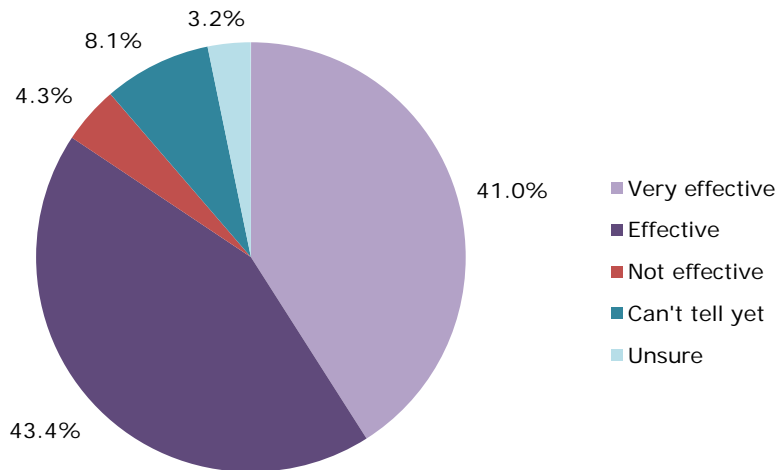


Figure 7. Respondent's ratings about Parentline increasing their ability to care.

Parents and carers also reflected on how their contact with the Parentline service had increased their ability to care for their child/children. From this qualitative feedback it is evident that their increased ability to care for their child was often the result of them implementing a new strategy or skill that they had gained during their contact with a Parentline Counsellor. In some of this feedback, respondents also spoke of the impact of realising that they needed to change their own behaviours first.

(Parent/Carer 2014):

*"I was able to talk to my son with ideas for how he can get his needs met, including admitting how he is feeling and recognising his emotions".*

(Parent/Carer 2012):

*"I am more in-tune with their needs so they sometimes seem more settled, secure, and happy. Having someone to talk to relieve frustration and increases my ability to deal with issues that arise and therefore limits the chances of the frustration being taken out on the children".*

(Parent/Carer 2014):

*"It made a difference in how I'm relating to my kids. I took them away for the weekend and we had some time together".*

(Parent/Carer 2014):

*"Yes - I gave my daughter space - and it changed. Too early to tell for the big picture but in this instance on the weekend it worked".*

### Service users want to recommend the service to others

Finally, survey respondents were asked if they would want to recommend the Parentline service to a friend. Since 2011, the proportion of respondents stating 'yes, I would recommend Parentline to a friend' has ranged from 100% in 2011 to 94.6% of respondents in 2013. During this period, the proportion of respondents stating 'no, I wouldn't recommend Parentline to a friend' was never higher than 2.0% of the total survey participants. The data concerning recommending a friend to the Parentline service is shown in Figure 8.

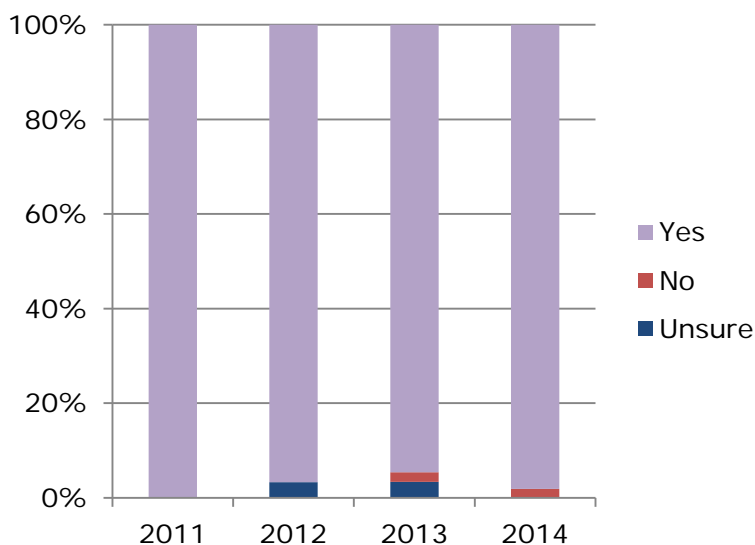


Figure 8. Respondent's ratings about whether they would recommend Parentline to others.

A number of survey respondents offered positive qualitative feedback regarding the Parentline service, and spoke of their past experience recommending Parentline to friends or family members. Additionally, a few parents and carers made their own recommendations to the Government, requesting that the Parentline service be continued into the future. It was evident in this qualitative feedback, that a number of respondents are passionate about the Parentline service, and grateful for its existence.

*(Parent/Carer 2013):*

*"I have already recommended Parentline. I've said to others they really help you to get support, ideas and strategies - and they really understand you so you don't feel so bad if you make a mistake".*

*(Parent/Carer 2013):*

*"Waiting times are not too long and I really appreciate the service. (I would) encourage the Australian Government to keep this service going. It's vital that the government knows we're keeping families together - giving support. Parentline gave me lots of compassion. And they are very professional - really well trained"*

*(Parent/Carer 2011):*

*"It's so important to be able to talk to the same person with no time limit. It's good that I can call late at night. Free Services like this are much needed".*

## References

- Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2013). *Risk and protective factors for child abuse and neglect: CFCA resource sheet*. Viewed at 27 February 2015 <https://www3.aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/risk-and-protective-factors-child-abuse-and-neglect>
- Counts, J., Buffington, E., Chang-Rios, K., Rasmussen, H., & Preacher, K. (2010). The development and validation of the protective factors survey: A self-report measure of protective factors against child maltreatment. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 34, 762-772.